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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 BEIRUT 001545

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NSC FOR ABRAMS/WERNER/DORAN/SINGH

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TAGS: [PORG](#) [PREL](#) [KDEM](#) [UNSC](#) [LE](#) [SY](#) [QT](#) [KPAL](#)

SUBJECT: MGLE01: PM SINIORA MEETING WITH A/S SILVERBERG --
LEBANON EAGER FOR NEW UNSCR RESOLUTION

Classified By: Jeffrey Feltman, Ambassador. Reason: Section 1.4 (b).

1. (C) Summary: On May 15, A/S for International Organizations Affairs, Kristen Silverberg, accompanied by the Ambassador, met with Prime Minister Fouad Siniora in his offices at the Grand Serail in Beirut. PM Siniora opened the meeting by expressing his satisfaction with his visit to Washington. Siniora saw his visit as a positive opportunity to work out differences between the two countries. He denied what he called "the clash of civilizations" and promised to seek opportunities to cooperate with the West. Siniora said he had just returned from a trip to London where he met with the Prime Minister and the Chancellor of the Exchequer. The PM was most impressed by his meetings at the London School of Economics and at the Royal Institute of International Affairs (Chatham House) where he noted a high interest in Lebanese affairs. In pursuit of an acceptable Security Council resolution following on UNSCR 1559, the PM had met with key Ambassadors to lobby them for a powerful resolution. Urging him to support the P-3 language, A/S Silverberg cautioned Siniora that to suggest language changes at this point could be counter-productive. Siniora said he had received verbal agreement from Qatar to support the Lebanese. Siniora agreed with A/S Silverberg that Lebanon should appoint a permanent representative for its UN mission in New York. He said he was considering names of appointees outside of the Foreign Ministry for that job and for Washington. Siniora was optimistic that his economic reform program would go to Parliament in the coming session. He also said he was dispatching ministers to present the plan to the public. End Summary.

PLEASED WITH WASHINGTON, LONDON TRIPS

2. (C) The Ambassador began the meeting with two bits of good news. He delivered to the PM picture from his visit to the White House, and a letter from the NSC praising the work of the DCM of the GOL embassy in Washington for her work on the trip. PM Siniora was clearly very pleased with the letter and photos and they inspired him to once again speak favorably of his Washington trip. Siniora spoke enthusiastically about the opportunity to work with the U.S., and the West overall, on common issues and to avoid conflicts. He said he did not believe in the clash of civilizations, and meetings like his in Washington could help alleviate tensions between East and West. From Washington, Siniora turned to his recent trip to London. He was pleased with his reception by the Prime Minister and the Chancellor of the Exchequer. However, the PM was most pleased by the interest in Lebanon showed during his visits to the London School of Economics and at Chatham House, which he described as influential think tanks. He explained that UK officials

were interested in helping Lebanon and quizzed him about the country's needs.

U.S.-LEBANESE WORK FOR SECURITY COUNCIL RESOLUTION

13. (C) A/S Silverberg asked Siniora what progress he had made on garnering support for a new Security Council resolution on Lebanon. The PM said he had met separately with the Ambassadors of Russia, China, Argentina, Greece and Qatar to ask for their support for a strong resolution. Of special concern to the GOL was a paragraph calling for diplomatic relations between Lebanon and Syria. Siniora said he understood that the Russians and the Argentines did not like the notion of the UN pressing diplomatic relations on two parties. The PM said there was also considerable resistance to language on the delineation of the common Syria-Lebanon border. Urging the PM to stick to the P-3 draft, A/S Silverberg suggested that continued support for the existing language would ensure that we maintained a strong negotiating hand. She emphasized the need for close coordination between the P-3 and Lebanon.

14. (C) Siniora said he had received verbal agreement from Qatar to support the resolution, but he admitted that he was uncertain of Qatar's resolve in this matter. He said that he would follow up with a call to Qatar's MFA to make sure of their support in New York. He described China as "a mirror," difficult to read. Siniora said that he had delivered his demarche to the Chinese Charge d'Affaires. The PM said both Greece and Argentina seem supportive of the GOL's position. Russia, Siniora said, "has nice words, and sounds supportive." Siniora offered to meet with additional ambassadors to build support for the resolution.

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LEBANON NEEDS HELP ON SHEBAA FARMS SOVEREIGNTY

15. (C) Still discussing the UN, Siniora said he had raised the international tribunal issue and Shebaa farms in his meetings with UN SYG Annan. Siniora said he walked away with the impression that the UN was prepared to work with Lebanon on the international tribunal, but would not want to do the detailed work. On the issue of Shebaa, Siniora was less pleased with the SYG's comments. He said he asked Annan directly, "What must Lebanon do to have sovereignty over Shebaa?" But he received no response. Siniora said now, Syria says that Shebaa is Lebanese, and the international community says that Shebaa is Syrian. Siniora said he was worried that if he asked for help solving the Shebaa problem, others could dismiss him by saying that the UN considers Shebaa to be Syrian.

COOPERATION AT THE UN

16. (C) A/S Silverberg asked if Lebanon would soon appoint a permanent representative to the UN. She explained that proper representation at the Council was important if Lebanon wished to be heard. PM Siniora acknowledged that New York was a key position for the Lebanese given the level of activity in the UN. He told the SYG, "We are becoming your best customer." Siniora said he was equally concerned about the Lebanese embassy in Washington. He is considering names for the positions, but he said that these appointments were linked to a complex array of local political issues, including presidential approval. (Note: Here, Siniora was clearly speaking about the confessional difficulties of replacing Ambassadors while being careful to maintain balance between Christians and Muslim appointees. End note). He said of the GOL, "We need to agree on a name." In the meantime, Siniora has moved the Lebanese Ambassador to Mexico, Nouhad Mahmoud, on a short term basis to New York to follow the Security Council portfolio. Siniora described the

Ambassador as an able and respected man.

IMMINENT PROGRESS ON REFORM AND ELECTION LAW

¶17. (C) Siniora said the Council of Ministers would be meeting on May 17 in special session to discuss the question of electrical power generation and the state utility company Electricite du Liban. He promised that in the future, there would be more meetings of the council of ministers. The PM's Chief Economic Adviser, Mohamed Chattah, joined the conversation by saying that parliamentary committees would be discussing the GOL economic reform plan in the coming session on May 18. Chattah added that World Bank experts visited the GOL and met with the cabinet to address possible changes in the administration of social security. The experts were looking for ways to improve GOL service in social services without increasing local costs. The PM added that these were ways in which the GOL was addressing the social costs of economic reform. He added that ministers would be meeting with various groups in the coming weeks to present the reform plan to the people of Lebanon. He hoped that public presentations would head off the negative rumors circulating about the aims and costs of reform.

¶18. (C) Continuing on reform efforts, Siniora said the national electoral commission might be making a breakthrough on the electoral law. Siniora said the electoral redistricting of Lebanon was the most sensitive and important part of any new law. He said the new law must be designed to accommodate the diversity of the religious communities. He hoped that any law would allow each community to elect its representatives in a transparent manner. In that way constituents would be able to directly influence their elected representatives.

HIZBALLAH AND AOUN AGAINST THE GOL
IN THE NATIONAL DIALOGUE

¶19. (C) A/S Silverberg asked Siniora to give her a read-out of the national dialogue to date. Siniora was very pleased with progress made on the Palestinian portfolio. He expressed the hope that the international community would continue to support the improvements in the Palestinian camps inside Lebanon. Siniora said he had a good meeting with the Palestinian Representative in Lebanon, Abbas Zaki.

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¶10. (C) The PM said the internal political positions among dialogue participants are becoming clearer. Hizballah sees the GOL as trying to disarm it. The GOL is asserting its right to full sovereignty over all Lebanese territory. All parties maintain that Israeli is still an enemy of Lebanon. "The remaining question is how do we best defend ourselves from this enemy." Siniora said the GOL was prepared to discuss common defense with Hizballah. The GOL maintains that the Taif agreements, which call for respect of the 1949 armistice agreement with Israel, guide Lebanese policies. Siniora said he was ready to give Hizballah credit for liberating the south of Lebanon. However, Lebanon could not continue to support Hizballah as a state within a state. The PM explained that Hizballah enjoys the support of two groups of Shia supporters: its members, and what Siniora described as fans.

¶11. (C) Siniora said that a very limited number of Sunni support Hizballah; most support the majority and the GOL. Many Christians were with this majority. However, General Aoun, fixated on the presidency, is appealing to the fears and extremist views of Christians, trying to link himself and his supporters to Hizballah. Siniora explained that Lebanon's confessional system encourages groups to take up a defensive posture whenever they feel threatened from the outside. To counter Aoun, Christians allied with the March

14 Group are taking extremist positions so as not to be outdone, and outmaneuvered by Aoun, with Christian voters. This maneuvering in the Christian ranks distracts politicians from the main debate. He lamented that he is faced with a choice of allowing Emile Lahoud to complete the rest of his presidential term, or having six years of "misery" with Michel Aoun in the presidency. He said he did not believe that Lebanon could survive another president with the autocratic leadership style often adopted by military men.

SINIORA AND LAHOUD WILL BE AT
WORLD ECONOMIC FORUM

¶12. (C) The PM said he would travel for one day to the World Economic Forum at Sharm al Sheikh at the invitation of President Mubarak. He said President Lahoud would be attending the same event, but neither man was heading a national delegation. The PM and President had both been invited. Siniora saw no danger of a conflict with Lahoud at the meetings. Siniora joked that Mubarak, when asked why he had initially invited Lahoud in February 2006, replied "Perhaps he will not be around by then."

¶13. (U) A/S Silverberg has cleared this cable.
FELTMAN